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C O N F I D E N T I A L GUATEMALA 000189

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [KJUS](#) [GT](#) [UN](#) [OAS](#)

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR AND PRESS MAINTAIN PRESSURE ON GOG FOR PROPOSAL TO INVESTIGATE CLANDESTINE GROUPS

REF: A. GUATEMALA 146

[¶](#)B. GUATEMALA 171

Classified By: Katharine Read, HROff, for reason 1.5 (d).

[¶](#)1. (SBU) Summary: In the days following the Human Rights Ombudsman's public presentation of the proposal for a UN-OAS led commission to investigate clandestine groups (Ref A)), the media has followed up with domestic editorials and international endorsements of the idea. The Ambassador has continued to solicit support from the GOG, in both his January 17 meeting with Foreign Minister Gutierrez, and his January 21 meeting with Finance Minister Weymann (Ref B). End Summary.

[¶](#)2. (U) Leading dailies Siglo Veintiuno and El Periodico covered the statements made by the Ambassador, the Canadian Ambassador, Amnesty International London, and local NGOs in support of the proposal. Siglo Veintiuno directly quoted the Ambassador's statement of, "It appears to me to be a very good initiative and very well thought-out. The Commission can make a contribution to the strengthening of democracy and I hope the Government supports it, because I think it is something positive." The Canadian Ambassador and Amnesty International reportedly echoed the Ambassador's sentiment and urged the GOG to support the Commission.

[¶](#)3. (U) In a January 20 signed editorial in El Periodico, human rights activist Miguel Angel Albizures wrote about the hold which clandestine groups exercise over the civilian government. Albizures acknowledged that clandestine groups were a pre-FRG phenomenon, but that the situation has deteriorated during the Portillo administration, despite Portillo's campaign promises to end the insecurity and delinquency affecting Guatemalans. Albizures reiterated the human rights community sentiment that 'enough is enough' and urged the GOG to "open its eyes, even though it is in the final stretch of its disastrous governance." He said that this proposal would "test Portillo's political will, because it is the President who must ask the UN and OAS for this Commission."

[¶](#)4. (C) In a January 17 meeting called by Foreign Minister Gutierrez to discuss counter-narcotics efforts, the Ambassador reiterated his support of the proposal to Gutierrez and Ministers of Defense and Interior. The Ambassador urged the GOG to give the proposal its full support and said that this would be a credible way in which they could demonstrate their commitment to reform. Gutierrez agreed that the presence of clandestine groups was alarming and said that he came to similar conclusions during his time at the SAE, when he produced a report on clandestine groups. However, Gutierrez mentioned that he believed any investigation should be geared towards a fact-finding exposition rather than an evidence-gathering prosecution. Gutierrez also spoke (vaguely) of the need to move ahead "at the right political moment." The Ambassador responded that there was no better moment than the present.

[¶](#)5. (C) On January 21, the Ambassador spoke with Finance Minister Eduardo Weymann, an FRG inner circle member, about human rights, CAFTA, and counternarcotics efforts. He said that the USG was giving the proposal firm public support and suggested it would behoove the GOG to back the effort to establish a commission to investigate clandestine groups. Weymann responded that Vice President Reyes would lead the FRG's policy on the proposal and that Reyes was already in contact with Helen Mack about this and other threats against human rights workers.

[¶](#)6. (C) Also on January 21, Congress passed a resolution proposed by opposition congresswoman Nineth Montenegro to urge Portillo to accept the proposal to investigate clandestine groups. The resolution passed with the support of 90 deputies, including members of the FRG. In response to public and private pressure for executive action, Portillo and Gutierrez announced on January 22 that they had invited Human Rights Watch Director Jose Miguel Vivanco to facilitate the discussion between the Ombudsman, human rights NGOs, and the GOG on the mandate of the proposed Commission. (NOTE: Vivanco is a long-time friend of Gutierrez, and his objectivity has been questioned by some. We know Vivanco, however, and believe his involvement can be helpful.) Human rights groups are concerned that this may be a ploy on behalf

of the GOG to hijack the Commission, but are refraining from public comment until they collectively decide how to proceed.

¶7. (C) COMMENT: We are pleased by the continued press coverage of the proposal. We will maintain the high-level dialogue on the proposal by raising it in press statements and in meetings with other GOG officials. End Comment.
Hamilton